Remarks on

Canada's Engagement with the Developing World: Priorities for the Next Ten Years

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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends. Let me first thank the CIIA for their invitation to this remarkably instructive and timely conference. It is an honour, and a pleasure, to join you in this conversation.

We have been asked, in this session, to consider "priorities for the next 10 years" in Canada's engagement with the developing world. Instead, I propose to discuss a category of countries that are very often not part of the developing world at all. These are the *undeveloping* countries we all know as failed and failing states.

It seems to me that few priorities will prove more urgent—or more difficult—than addressing the complicated menace of failed and failing states. Now, and for the foreseeable future, these countries will compel the attention of Canadians—and impose hard choices on the Canadian government.

The Martin cabinet's International Policy Statement, issued last April, acknowledged the importance of what it called "failed and fragile states." Indeed, the Statement declared this a priority issue of foreign and defence policy as well as development policy. And it is hard to imagine how Prime Minister Harper's government could escape the issue even if it wanted to.

The logic, after all, is simply inescapable. Whether badly governed or ungoverned, failed and failing states jeopardize Canadian interests and offend our principles. They sow violence within and beyond their borders, and undermine economic growth. They threaten the human security especially of the poor and the marginalized. And they commonly give shelter to terrorism and organized crime.

State failure is also immensely expensive. In Canada—notwithstanding CIDA's policy of focusing bilateral ODA on a limited number of promising recipients—the largest single claimant on Canadian ODA—Afghanistan—is not even on CIDA's list of 25 focus countries. Haiti and Iraq likewise demonstrate the high cost of state failure.

Of course, the safest policy remedy—and by far the cheapest—is to prevent state failure before it occurs. That means investing wisely, and early, in the development of democratic governance, the rule of law, basic human needs, and economic opportunity.

The case for prevention was well made in the recent report of a round table sponsored by the CIIA in Ottawa. That group (chaired by Bob Rae) set out 10 recommendations for Canadian policy—all commendably practical, and beginning with prevention.

To repeat: Failed and failing states are a menace that must be addressed across the whole of international policy. The government last April put the number of "dangerously weak or failing states" at 50; I have no reason to think the number has diminished since then. And failure or dangerous weakness emerges in every hemisphere—from Cambodia in Southeast Asia to the fragile democracies and near-democracies of the Americas, to almost every part of Africa, to the Middle East and the "stans" of the former Soviet Union—and, still, to the Balkans.

And they will tend, as I have said, to place additional claims on scarce Canadian resources—claims that will be hard to resist, and foolhardy to ignore.

All of this raises two significant implications for development research of the kind supported by my own organization, the International Development Research Centre.

The first implication, for IDRC and others, is that we Canadians will have to improve our own understanding of the dynamics of state failure, the strategies of prevention, and the best ways to encourage recovery from failure.

It is true that Canadian NGOs and scholars, and departments and agencies of government, have accumulated years of experience working in and on failed and failing states. But it is also true that we have failed, overall, to assemble the lessons learned from those separate and diverse experiences.

To put it bluntly: We don't even know what we know, because we haven't shared what we have learned in any systematic way.

Still, I am happy to report progress on one corrective innovation, the Democracy Council.

The Democracy Council was introduced—once, very briefly—in the Overview section of the International Policy Statement last April. Its mandate, cryptically described in that document, is "to guide good governance policy making."

In fact, the Council's purpose is to strengthen Canadian efforts at promoting democratic governance abroad. And among its first activities, now under way, is an attempt to gather a better understanding of what Canadians, in and out of government, are doing with respect to democracy promotion—not least in failed and failing states.

What is perhaps most interesting about the Democracy Council is its membership. Jointly chaired by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and the President of CIDA, its participants include the heads of Elections Canada; the Parliamentary Centre; the Forum of Federations; the National Judicial Institute; Rights and Democracy; and IDRC. In other words, membership reaches well outside the confines of government. And it connects with networks of expertise and activism across Canada.

The Council is still in its early days. But it could evolve into a coordinating enterprise that can greatly enlarge Canada's knowledge, and effectiveness, in managing the threat of failed and failing states.

So that is one significant implication of state failure for development research—the obligation on Canadians to expand and deploy our own understanding of failed and failing states.

The second commanding implication is the pressing need to foster the capacity for research by the people of those endangered states—research to inform and improve their own futures.

As many of you know, this has been the mission of IDRC since it was created by Parliament in 1970: To support development research, in developing countries, by the people of those countries.

For example: IDRC's Middle East Good Governance Fund (the MEGG Fund) aims to increase policy-relevant knowledge for advancing good government in the Middle East, and particularly in Iraq. The MEGG Fund has been financed by CIDA, in cooperation with Foreign Affairs.

One typical project provides support for a consortium of 12 Arab research and policy institutes working on homegrown political reform. Another, undertaken by the International Crisis Group, explores governance, reform and Islamism in Iraq and the Middle East. Besides Iraq, the MEGG Fund focuses on Lebanon and Palestine, with collaborations in Morocco, Yemen and other countries across the region.

As another example: IDRC has been supporting research on women's participation in the Darfur peace negotiations. This research, funded by Foreign Affairs Canada, is designed to inform policy and advocacy, so that the security of women and girls is fully addressed in those negotiations—and in the agreements reached. Our Darfur research fits naturally into a broader, multi-year analysis IDRC has been supporting on gender and generational issues in conflict, peace and justice processes in Uganda, Southern Sudan and Darfur.

Our objective there, as always, is to trigger the multiplier effects of building sustainable, local research capacity.

In summary, addressing failed and failing states—promoting democratic and sustainable governance—is an inescapable imperative. But we must know what we're doing, and what we are encouraging others to do.

That calls for stronger and better organized research in Canada. And it obliges us to support those abroad who are bearing the highest cost—and running the gravest risks—to save their own countries from failure.

Thank you.